

**Subject:** AFFEC Family Finding February 2014  
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## A Family For Every Child Family Finding

"Call it a clan, call it a network, call it a tribe, call it a family."

Whatever you call it, whoever you are, you need one."



### February 2014



From "The Chronicle of Social Change"  
**Seven Ways to Reform Foster Care**  
By [Georgette Todd](#),  
February 18, 2014

I spent my teenage years in foster care, bouncing around in 14 different placements in two separate counties. In that time, I've lived in almost every type of residency: emergency shelters, a homeless shelter, group homes, foster homes, and with kin.

Since emancipation (aging-out), I've worked in non-profits and child welfare agencies directly with youth, social workers, lawyers, juvenile court judges, legislators, agency managers and directors. All those jobs introduced me to hundreds of stories of successful and failed placements, kinships, adoptions and reunifications.

Considering my two decades of personal and professional experience in almost all levels of foster care, here's what I think would help reform the foster care system:

#### 1. Partner up with the Red Cross...or Kevin A. Campbell

I've always wondered how displaced families from

**A Family For Every Child's Family Finding** program is expanding! We are hoping to serve other counties across the state of Oregon and assist in discovering and engaging relatives to support and care for foster youth! In our five years of operation we have seen 73% of our cases result in supportive connections for youth leading to greater success and permanency.

If you are a caseworker, CASA, or other child welfare affiliate please e-mail the Permanency Director at [caitlin@afamilyforeverychild.org](mailto:caitlin@afamilyforeverychild.org) to learn more!

### Success Story: Ryan

Ryan had been living with his biological father and step mother along with two other biological half siblings, prior to entering the foster care system. Ryan first entered foster care when he was only four years old after having been removed from an increasingly neglectful home situation. Ryan and his half siblings, Damian and Levi, were all placed in separate foster care homes and both of his half brothers have since been placed in permanent homes.

Some relatives on Ryan's father's side of the family had been active in his life and after entering foster care he went to live with his paternal grandparents, Sol and Rayna. Ryan had not had contact with his mother since he was very young, and very little was known about his maternal relatives. Unfortunately Sol and

natural disasters come together and it turns out that the Red Cross has a sophisticated family finding tool in place. Kevin A. Campbell too has developed a family finding model that's used by the National Institute for Permanent Family Connectedness. Every child welfare agency and non-profit should have at least one family finding unit and family maintenance unit. If one is already in place, and if successful, double up on the efforts.

## 2. Investigative Think Tanks

There needs to be a standby resource for journalists who track funding. The idea: Once money is granted to an agency, check in after one year, find out what's working, what's not working so far, why, and use the tracking results to inform and alter the program accordingly. Failure is valuable information too.

## 3. Hollywood

It's great that The Fosters, Short Term 12, and a handful of foster care books exist, but in the aggregate, there needs to be a lot more storytelling efforts from the Hollywood community on the subject of foster care. The more our society is saturated with foster care stories, the more informed the general population will be and the less stigma foster children will have to endure. Recruitment would be a lot easier as a result too.

## 4. Youth Consultants

Foster youth are consumers of social services. As with any entity, there must be room for feedback. I'm not talking about disenfranchised youth ranting against an unfair system, but rather a thoughtful hiring of youth who can target areas of concern for the agency, answer questions, offer opinions and ideas as well as be educated on the regulatory realities and budget limitations agencies face. (Author's note: I co-founded ...)

Rayna could no longer care for Ryan for various reasons. This, along with the fact that both of his brothers had been placed with forever families, sparked Ryan's desire for his own happy ending.

In 2012 Ryan's caseworker suggested his case be referred to the Family Finding program in order to possibly find supportive connections with biological relatives. The Family Finding volunteer program mined Ryan's files, performed internet searches on relevant names, and ultimately attempted to contact possible relatives.

Relatives contacted were interviewed to learn more information about them and decide whether or not they would be a good influence on Peter. After these contacts were made the Family Finding team held a meeting to further determine which relatives and other loved ones would then be invited to a family meeting.

The work done to find Ryan's relatives was considerably successful and the Family Finding program was able to hold a meeting with Ryan's maternal great-grandmother, Jan, and maternal great-uncle, Gregg. Seeing as little information was available about Ryan's maternal relatives, this was a huge step towards introducing him to distant relatives whom could potentially be a permanent resource for him.

Ryan and Jan got along particularly well and Ryan expressed a desire to continue developing a relationship with her and hopefully others connected to his mother. Ryan continues to have contact with his paternal grandparents as well as multiple aunts and uncles on his father's side with frequent visits and phone calls.

Ryan is a pleasant boy, who loves to show off his skills, particularly his unparalleled ability to do cart-wheels. Ryan is very skilled at math, loves swimming, and is a natural at gymnastics. The structure of Ryan's

this type of program and will devote future posts on this subject of youth voice integration).

#### 5. Parent Trainers

Agencies could benefit from hiring parents (especially fathers) who have reunified with their children to engage parents who have lost their children to the system. If I lost my child to the system, and found myself in a court-appointed class, I would be more inclined to take in information from someone who went through what I was going through.

#### 6. Get Some Mad Men

Appeal to top advertisers to pro-bono or partner with your organization in soliciting donations or ratcheting up parent recruitment efforts.

#### 7. CASA Requirement

All Masters' of Social Work candidates should be required to become a CASA for at least one semester in their respective programs. It's one thing to read about caseloads, quite another to get a hands-on education early in their course of study.

Read the [entire article here](#)

current foster home has really helped him to be successful in school and with developing relationships. His foster family remains very open to contact with Ryan's other relatives as he continues to learn more about where he comes from.

\*name has been changed

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## Volunteers

Are you interested in becoming a Family Finding volunteer? We have multiple roles that may fit you!

**File mining:** Research child welfare case files and gather as much information as possible! Look for names, contact information, and addresses of those who may be a safe and enduring support for a child.

**Internet research:** Look online for relatives' social media profiles, updated contact information, and more!

**Calling and engagement:** Call relatives and lost loved ones to see if they can be a safe and committed support for the youth, and gather more information about the family's history and other supportive contacts

**Genogram Specialist:** Build detailed family trees using advanced software for each case!

To complete a volunteer application, visit our [website](#).

If you have questions about becoming a Family Finding volunteer, e-mail the Permanency Director at [caitlin@afamilyforeverychild.org](mailto:caitlin@afamilyforeverychild.org)

Our next volunteer training is from 9AM until 12PM on March 15th at 1675 W. 11th Ave., Eugene Oregon 97402.

We hope to see you there!

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